

Richard Burton's mausoleum

Tucked away in a south-west London cemetery, is the mausoleum of one of Britain's most ardent Victorian explorers and once-fellow of the RGS-IBG – Sir Richard Burton – and his equally daring wife, Lady Isabel Burton. A prolific author, translator, geographic explorer and diplomat, Burton's eccentric tent-shaped tomb encapsulates the spirit of the adventurer who led expeditions to Africa, and by the end of his life, had mastered at least 26 languages. Nicknamed 'Ruffian Dick', the explorer had a flamboyant, colourful reputation and a sometimes wild social life, but his many expeditions were serious and difficult enterprises.

To celebrate Burton's bicentenary in May 2021, the Environment Trust, a nature and heritage conservation charity that cares for the mausoleum, has announced a yearlong programme of events to commemorate Burton and raise funds for continued maintenance of the tomb. *Burton: Exploring Without Boundaries* encourages everyone to become an explorer and discover local historic sites and green spaces. The project includes resources for schools, exclusive behind-the-scenes tours of local heritage sites and partnership events with charities. 'This project is all about sharing the fascinating stories of Burton and his wife with as many people as possible,' says Emily Lunn, heritage project manager at the Environment Trust.

The Trust's involvement began in 2010 when the mausoleum was on Historic England's 'Heritage at Risk Register'. Cracks had appeared, layers of paint had come away in large sections, littering the two coffins, and everything was covered in a thick layer of dust. With support from Friends of Burton and Historic England, the Trust appointed conservators to repair the mausoleum. Objects collected by the Burtons during their travels, including camel bells, lanterns, and a miniature of Sir Richard found inside the tomb, were painstakingly conserved. The mausoleum was given a new lease of life, making the Bedouin-style stone tent appear to ripple in the breeze.

The Environment Trust is now seeking to increase access to the heritage site in St Mary Magdalen Roman Catholic Church, Mortlake, to once more allow the public inside (the door was bricked up in the 1970s). 'It is wonderful to think that this will be here to inspire future generations of geographic explorers for many years to come,' says Emily.

As Mary Lovell, author of *A Rage to Live*, a biography of Burton, said: 'This fascinating man deserves to be remembered if only to illustrate how rich and full a life can be when lived without boundaries.' ●

To find out more about the Environment Trust's mausoleum appeal and events connected to *Burton: Exploring Without Boundaries*, please visit environmenttrust.org.



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From Burton's 'Personal Narrative of a Pilgrimage to Al-Madinah and Meccah', 1855



Restoration of the mausoleum involved painstaking conservation both inside and out



Richard Francis Burton: 9 March 1821 - 20 October 1890

On Monday 8 June, the Society is hosting a special collections event on Burton's extraordinary life called *Be inspired: Always ready for an expedition* with Natalie Cox. Venue: Royal Geographical Society (with IBG), 1 Kensington Gore, London, SW7 2AR. Tickets: Free for members, £5 non-members. For more information about the RGS-IBG's collections, please visit rgs.org/collections.